

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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R 252145Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9765
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA POUCH
AMCONSUL CALI POUCH
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CO
SUBJECT: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THIS WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. LATIN AMERICAN COFFEE PRODUCING COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES MET AUGUST 22-23 IN BOGOTA TO DISCUSS COFFEE PRICES, BUT DID NOT FIX A DESIRED PRICE RANGE. WHILE THE TURBAY ADMINISTRATION WORKED BEHIND THE SCENES TO PREPARE AND LAUNCH ITS PROGRAMS, THREE CABINET MINISTERS DEFENDED THEMSELVES AGAINST OLD ACCUSTATIONS, OPPOSITION LEADER ALVARO GOMEZ PROPOSED MAJOR JUDICIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL REFORMS. OF THE THREE MINISTERS UNDER ATTACK, TWO WERE DEFENDING THEMSELVES FROM REVIVED ALLEGATIONS OF WRONGDOING IN THEIR FORMER CAPACITIES. THE THIRD, FOREIGN MINISTER LIEVANO, WAS DEFENDING HIMSELF AND FORMER PRESIDENT LOPEZ AGAINST CHARGES OF THROWING AWAY COLOMBIA'S PANAMA CANAL RIGHTS. PRO-SOVIET GUERRILLA LEADER "TIRO FIJO" REPORTEDLY ANNOUNCED WHAT MAY WELL BE ILLUSORY "UNITY OF ACTION" WITH THE PRO-CUBAN ELN, BUT

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DENOUNCED THE "MAOIST" EPL, IN AN OTHERWISE UNEVENTFUL WEEK ON THE TERRORISM FRONT. END SUMMARY.

2. COFFEE SUMMIT MEETING HELD IN BOGOTA. FROM AUGUST 22 TO AUGUST 23, HIGH LEVEL REPRESENTATIVES OF EIGHT LATIN AMERICAN COFFEE PRODUCING COUNTRIES MET IN BOGOTA IN AN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH A COMMON POSITION ON COFFEE PRICES.

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING, A BRIEF COMMUNIQUE WAS ISSUED WHICH RECOMMENDED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PRICE STABILIZING MECHANISM BUT MADE NO REFERENCE TO SPECIFIC PRICE RANGES. ACCORDING TO AN OFFICIAL OF THE COLOMBIAN COFFEE FEDERATION, THE PARTICIPANTS DID NOT FIX A RANGE OF PRICES, SINCE THE NEXT MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL COFFEE ORGANIZATION WILL BEGIN ONLY ON SEPTEMBER 13 AND ANY NUMBER OF FACTORS RELATED TO COFFEE SUPPLY AND DEMAND COULD ALTER THE MARKET SITUATION BETWEEN THE PRESENT TIME AND SEPTEMBER 13, THEREBY RENDERING IRRELEVANT ANY PRICE AGREED UPON NOW. THE OFFICIAL ALSO STATED THAT AFRICAN COFFEE PRODUCING NATIONS--ONE OF WHICH, THE IVORY COAST, HAD AN OBSERVER AT THE LATIN AMERICAN MEETING--PLAN TO MEET IN PARIS IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, BEFORE THE ICO MEETING, TO CONSIDER THE CONCLUSIONS REACHED AT BOGOTA AND FORMULATE THEIR OWN POLICIES. (FOR FURTHER DETAILS, SEE BOGOTA 7980, 8041 AND 8099.)

3. CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES DEBATES COLOMBIAN RIGHTS UNDER NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATIES. BOGOTA 7089 REPORTED THAT THE QUESTION OF COLOMBIA'S RIGHTS UNDER THE NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATIES HAD BEEN RAISED IN THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVE SOON AFTER THAT BODY'S FIRST MEETING. IN THE MIDDLE OF LAST WEEK, THE DEBATE HEATED UP, WITH REPRESENTATIVE JAIME PINZON LOPEZ CHARGING THAT, WHEN FORMER PRESIDENT LOPEZ SIGNED THE ACT OF CONTADORA IN 1975, HE EXCHANGED ASSURED COLOMBIAN RIGHTS FOR "SIMPLE EXPECTATIONS OR PROMISES." LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE LOWER HOUSE, ALVARO BERNAL SEGURA, WENT EVEN FARTHER AND ACCUSED THE GOVERNMENT OF HAVING LIED TO THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE NEW TREATIES. APPEARING BEFORE THE CHAMBER'S FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, FONMIN INDALECIO LIEVANO (WHO HELD THE SAME POSITION UNDER LOPEZ) EFFECTIVELY DEFENDED THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION'S POSITION. HE POINTED OUT THAT COLOMBIA COULD NOT HAVE INSISTED ON THE MAINTENANCE OF RIGHTS THAT DEROGATED FROM PANAMA'S SOVEREIGNTY AND INDEPENDENCE. HE ALSO NOTED THAT PANAMA HAD FREELY DECLARED ITS INTENTION TO GRANT COLOMBIA THE RIGHTS IT HAD FORMERLY ENJOYED AND THAT COLOMBIA THUS HAD LOST NOTHING AND, AT THE SAME TIME, CONTRIBUTED TO THE ELIMINATION OF A SOURCE OF FRICTION. COMMENT: THERE IS CONSIDERABLE CONCERN HERE REGARDING COLOMBIA'S RIGHTS UNDER THE NEW TREATIES, SPRINGING IN PART NO DOUBT FROM DISTRUST OF THE PANAMANIAN HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, GEN TORRIJOS. WHILE LIEVANO'S EXPLANATION OF THE CONSIDERATIONS BEHIND THE SIGNING OF THE ACT OF CONTADORA ARE APPRECIATED, MANY COLOMBIANS WILL NOT REST EASY UNTIL PANAMA'S COMMITMENT TO RESPECT COLOMBIA'S RIGHTS IS PUT IN BLACK AND WHITE.

4. TWO NEW MINISTERS ACCUSED OF MALFEASANCE. LESS THAN

THREE WEEKS AFTER ASSUMING OFFICE, TWO CABINET-LEVEL MEMBERS OF THE TURBAY ADMINISTRATION HAVE BEEN ACCUSED PUBLICLY OF MALFEASANCE WHILE IN PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTAL POSITIONS. ON AUGUST 20, THE JOURNALIST DANIEL SAMPER ALLEGED THAT MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE GERMAN BULA HOYOS, WHILE A MEMBER OF THE SENATE, HAD DRAWN A SALARY AS LEGAL ADVISOR TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RICE MILLERS. AND TWO DAYS LATER, IN THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES, ANTONIO ESCOBAR BRAVO, A MEMBER OF THE LOWER HOUSE, CHARGED MINISTER OF JUSTICE HUGO ESCOBAR SIERRA WITH HAVING PERSONALLY PROFITED FROM THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SPORT STADIUM IN SANTA MARTA, A PROJECT HE HAD USED HIS POLITICAL POSITION TO PROMOTE. BOTH MINISTERS PROMPTLY DENIED THE VAILIDTY OF THE ACCUSTATIONS--WHICH IN BOTH CASES HAD BEEN AIRED ON EARLIER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OCCASIONS--AND ESCOBAR SIERRA IN TURN ACCUSED ESCOBAR BRAVO OF HAVING "MAFIA"CONNECTIONS. COMMENT: ESCOBAR SIERRA AND ESCOBAR BRAVO, ONCE POLITICAL ALLIES FROM THE SAME NORTH COAST AREA, HAVE LONG BEEN AT LOGGERHEADS, AND THE PUBLIC IS NOT

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LIKELY TO TAKE THE LATTER'S CHARGES AGAINST THE FORMER TOO SERIOUSLY. GIVEN SAMPER'S REPUTATION AS ONE OF COLOMBIA'S MOST EFFECTIVE INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS, HIS ACCUSTATION AGAINST BULA, HOWEVER, WILL NOT BE LAID TO REST SIMPLY BY THE AGRICULTURAL MINISTER'S DENIAL OF WRONGDOING.

6. CONSERVATIVE LEADER PROPOSES JUDICIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL REFORM. ALVARO GOMEZ HURTADO, LEADER OF THE MAJORITY "ALVARISTA" FACTION OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, ANNOUNCED TWO MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROPOSALS DURING THE WEEK. THE MORE RELEVANT OF THE TWO TO AMERICAN INTERESTS WAS HIS PROPOSAL TO STREAMLINE COLOMBIAN JUSTICE BY DIVIDING THE PRESENT ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE (PROCURADARIA GENERAL) IN TWO AND CREATING A NEW POSITION OF PROSECUTOR GENERAL (FISCAL GENERAL), WHO WOULD BE IN CHARGE OF INVESTIGATING CRIME AND PROSECUTING CRIMINALS--A TASK WHICH OFTEN FALLS BETWEEN CHAIRS IN COLOMBIA, RESULTING IN ACQUITTAL OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CRIMINALS FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE. THE FISCAL GENERAL WOULD HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DIRECTING COLOMBIA'S JUDICIAL POLICE AND FOR ALLOCATING, COORDINATING AND OVERSEEING INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES OF OTHER POLICE AND INVESTIGATIVE ORGANS. THE PROCURADOR GENERAL WOULD REMAIN IN CHARGE OF INVESTIGATING AND PROSECUTING ABUSES BY PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND IMPLEMENTING AND ENFORCING LEGISLATIVE, EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL DECISIONS. GOMEZ' OTHER REFORM PROPOSAL WAS TO REORGANIZE THE OPERATIONS OF COLOMBIA'S CONGRESS. LEGISLATION WOULD BE APPROVED OR REJECTED IN SEPARATE, PRE-ANNOUNCED SESSIONS, AT WHICH ONLY A ONE-THIRD QUORUM WOULD BE REQUIRED, BUT MEMBERS WOULD LOSE THEIR SEATS IF THEY MISSED WITH SUCH VOTING SESSIONS. MEMBERS WOULD ALSO LOSE THEIR SEATS IN THE EVENT OF THEIR BEING FOUND TO BE INVOLVED IN SIGNIFICANT CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS. COMMITTEES WOULD BE AUTHORIZED TO HOLD U.S.-STYLE PUBLIC INVESTIGATIVE HEARINGS AND SUBPOENA WITNESSES, WHO, HOWEVER COULD APPEAL TO THE COUNCIL OF STATE TO BE EXCUSED ON GROUNDS OF NATIONAL SECURITY OR UNJUSTIFIED INVASION OF PRIVACY OR POTENTIAL PERSONAL DAMAGE. CONGRESSIONAL IMMUNITY FROM CRIMINAL PROSECUTION WOULD BE ENDED, WITH JURISDICTION OVER CASES INVOLVING SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES BEING RESERVED FOR THE SUPREME COURT, HOWEVER. SALARIES WOULD BE PEGGED TO AN INDEX OF AVERAGE GOVERNMENT SALARIES, TO SAVE CONGRESS THE EMBARRASSMENT OF VOTING THEIR OWN INCREASES. COMMENT: GOMEZ' JUDICIAL REFORM PROPOSAL WON WIDESPREAD ACCLAIM, INCLUDING AN ENDORSEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME COURT. IF ADOPTED, IT SHOULD HELP THE ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORT, AS WELL AS STRENGTHEN LAW ENFORCEMENT IN GENERAL. GOMEZ' CONGRESSIONAL REFORM PROJECT WAS ALSO WELL

RECEIVED, PARTICULARLY AS IT IS ALTOGETHER CONSISTENT WITH
THE MANY CALLS FOR REFORM THAT HAVE BEEN MADE BY MEMBERS
OF THE CHAMBER AND OF THE SENATE INTERESTED
IN IMPROVING THE CONGRESS' REPUTATION, INCREASING ITS
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EFFECTIVENESS, POWER, AND PRESTIGE, AND REDUCING ABSENTEEISM.

8. FARC LEADER UNILATERALLY ANNOUNCES "UNITY OF ACTION"
WITH PRO-CUBAN ELN; DENOUNCES MAOISTS. NO SIGNIFICANT
TERRORIST INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED DURING THE WEEK, BUT THE
THEME OF GUERRILLA UNITY REAPPEARED IN THE PRESS. QUOTING
FROM "RESISTENCIA", OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY
ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC), LEADING BOGOTA DAILY "EL
TIEMPO" REPORTED THAT FARC LEADER PEDRO ANTONIO MARIN
("TIRO FIJO") HAD ANNOUNCED "UNITY OF ACTION" WITH THE
PRO-CUBAN NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY AND THE FORMATION OF
A NEW JOINT UNIT TO BE HEADED BY RECENTLY RELEASED GUERRILLA
LEADER TARSICIO GUARACAS. HOWEVER, THE ANNOUNCEMENT SIGNED
BY MARIN ALSO VIRULTEMENTLY ATTACKED THE "MAOIST" COMMUNIST
PARTY OF COLOMBIA AS A TRAITOR TO THE WORKING CLASS AND TO
THE PEOPLE. COMMENT: THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO DATE OF ANY
COORDINATED GUERRILLA ACTIVITY BY FARC AND ELN AND SIMILAR
DECLARATIONS HAVE PROVEN ILLUSORY IN THE PAST. THE ANTI-MAOIST
VITUPERATION EVIDENTLY PRECLUDES ANY FARC COOPERATION WITH
THE "MAOIST" EPL GUERRILLAS. NEVERTHELESS, THE POSSIBILITY OF
COOPERATION AMONG THE VARIOUS GUERRILLA GROUPS OPERATING IN BOLOMBIA
HAS LONG BEEN FEARED BY COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES.
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